

# KALE

## One of the Best Stories Ever Written by Don Marquis

"SE that old fellow there?" asked Ed the waiter. Well, his fad is money."

The old fellow indicated—he must have been nearly eighty—sat, eating corned beef and cabbage, in a little booth in a certain delightful, greasy, old chophouse in downtown New York. It was nearly time to close the chophouse for that day, for it was almost 11 o'clock at night; it was nearly time to close the chophouse forever, for it was the middle of June, 1919. In a couple of weeks the war-time prohibition act would be in force, and Ed and I had been discussing what effect it would have upon our respective lives.

There was no one else in the place at the time except the cashier and the old man whose fad was money, and so Ed had condescended toward me, as a faithful customer, and was sitting down to have a drink with me.

"His fad is money?" I questioned, glancing at the old gentleman, who seemed to be nothing extraordinary as regards face or manner or attire. He had a long, bony New Englandish head and a short, white, well-trimmed beard; he was finishing his nowise delicate food with gusto. "I should say," I added, "that his fad was corned beef and cabbage."

"That's one of his fads," admitted Ed the waiter, "and I don't know but that it's as strong in him as his money fad. At any rate, I've never seen him without one or the other was near him, and both in large quantities."

We had been conversing in a murmur, so that our voices should not carry to the old gentleman. And now Ed dropped his voice still lower and whispered:

"That's Old Man Singleton."

I looked at him with a renewed interest. Every one knew who Old Man Singleton was, and many persons liked to guess how much he was worth. Ostensibly he had retired, leaving to his two sons the management of the Singleton banking business, with its many ramifications, but actually he kept his interest in the concern, and was reputed to be coaching his grandsons in the ways of the world, especially that part of the world known as "the street."

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**S**TARTING out as a New England villager who hated poverty because his family had always known it, he had come to New York as a lad of twenty, with red knitted mittens on his osseous hands, and he had at once removed the mittens and put the hands to work gathering money; it was rumored that the hands had never turned loose any of the garnered coin; it was even said by some persons that he still had the same pair of mittens. The details of his rise I cannot give; he had achieved his ambition to be one of the very rich men of American because the ambition was so strong within him.

"Of course his fad is money," I muttered to Ed the waiter. "Everybody knows that Old Man Singleton's fad is money."

Ed was about to reply, when Mr. Singleton looked up and motioned for his check. Ed brought it, and gave the old gentleman his hat and stick butter. Larry and his mother were

can't you? Or digging trenches to lay gas pipes in, or carrying a hod? Huh? And I can't even get a job in a swell restaurant uptown; they don't want any game-legged waiters sticking around, falling over the chairs. I was about the only kind of a joint and the only kind of a job I was fit for, this chophouse thing down here, and it's going to close in two weeks. What then? Be somebody's housemaid? I can't see it. I don't wish anybody any bad luck, but I hope the guy that put over this prohibition thing gets stiff in all his joints and lives forever."

I sympathized and waited, and finally he began.

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"**O**LD MAN SINGLETON'S fad," said Ed, "as I remarked before, is money. And, as you remarked, another of his fads is corned beef and cabbage—especially cabbage. He will eat corned beef with his cabbage, and like it; or he will eat pork with his cabbage, and like it; or he will eat cabbage without either; it is the cabbage he likes—or kale. In fact, you could reduce his two fads to one, and say what he likes is kale—kale in the slang sense of money and kale that is cabbage. And all his life he has been stuffing himself with kale."

"His fad is kale that he can see and feel and handle and show and carry about with him. Not merely money in the bank and stocks and bonds and property and real estate, but actual cash. He likes to carry it with him, and he does carry it with him. I guess he likes the feel of it in his bill-folder, and the thought that he has got it on him—or him, the poor boy that came out of New England, with the red knitted mittens on that everybody has heard so much about. I can understand the way he feels about it; with a folder full of thousand-dollar and ten-thousand-dollar bills he feels safe, somehow; feels like he'll never have to go back to that little New England town and saw cordwood and shovel snow again.

"He's got it on him now, that folder, and I'll bet you on it. That's what I mean when I said it wasn't safe for him to be trotting about this way after night. For if I know it, it stands to reason others know it, too.

"What you want to know is, how I know it. Well, I was not always what I am now. Once I was quite a guy and wore dress suits and went to the Metropolitan opera and listened to peaks to peaks. Yes, sir, I know every damed acoustic in that place! They weren't my dress suits that I wore, but they fit me. Once I moved in the circles of the idle rich, though I didn't know it, and helped 'em spend the unearned increment they wrung from the toil of the down-trodden laboring man.

"Once, to come down to brass tacks, I was a butler's companion. It is an office you won't find listed in the social directory, but it existed, for me at least. The butler in the case was a good friend of mine by the name of Larry Hodgkins, and being part Irish, he was an old English butler. Larry and his mother were

came a millionaire down here in New York City. He was tickled to see her and he didn't care a darn if she was Jake Hergesheimer's housekeeper. She could cook cabbage and kale better than any one else in the world and he used to come and sit with her and talk about that little old town up there and indulge in his favorite dissipations.

"Old Man Singleton has had what you call the social entree in New York for a good many years; for so long that some of his children and all of his grandchildren were born with it. But he never took it very seriously himself. He has been an in-and-outter, you might say. If he saw Mrs. Hodgkins around Jake's house he would call her Mary and ask her how folks were up home in front of Jake and his wife and a whole bunch of guests, just as soon as not.

"And his sons and his daughters and his grandchildren never could get him out of those ways; he always was bullheaded about doing what he pleased, so Mrs. Hodgkins told me, and he always will be. And the old lady liked to see him and chide with him and cook for him; and, believe me, she was some cook when she set herself to it. Not merely kale, but everything. She didn't cook for the Hergesheimers—they had a chef for that—but they missed it by not having her. Virtually was old Mary's middle name, and she could rustle up some of the best grub you ever threw your lip over.

"At first Old Man Singleton and Mrs. Hodgkins didn't mix much with us younger folks when we pulled a party. It wasn't that we were too aristocratic for them, for off-duty, as I said before, butlers and other swells can be as easy and jolly as common people. But they seemed too antiquated, if you get me; they were living too much in the past."

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"**A**ND then, one night, I discovered what Old Man Singleton's fad was—kale. Money. Big money. Big money on his person. It was his way; Larry and I wanted to go downtown and have a little fun, but neither of us had any cash in hand. Larry had a check for \$150, which Jake Hergesheimer had sent him, but all the tradesmen we knew were closed at that hour and there wasn't any way to cash it, unless Old Man Singleton could.

"Mr. Singleton," says Larry to the old man, who was sitting down to a mess of pork and kale with Mrs. Hodgkins, "maybe you can cash this for me?" And he handed him the check.

"The old man stopped eating and put his glasses on and pulled a billfold out of his pocket, with a kind of a pleased smile on his face.

"Let me see," he says, taking out the billfold and running them over with his fingers; "let me see."

"I nearly dropped dead. There wasn't a bill in there of lower denomination than one thousand dollars, and the most of them were ten-thousand-dollar bills."

"No, Larry," says the old man, "I'm afraid I can't, afraid I can't—haven't got the change."

"And while we stood there and looked, he smoothed and patted these bills, and folded and refolded them, and then put them back into his pocket and patted the pocket."

"Mary," he says to the old woman, with a grin, "that's quite a lot of money for little Lem Singleton to be carrying around in his pocket, ain't it?"

"It is that, Lemuel," said the old man, though his cellar and grocers

house is uptown, between the sixties and eighties, east of the park, and he wants it kept so he can drop into it with his family and a flock of servants at any hour of the day or night, from any part of the earth, and before I left there I can begin to understand how these debutes feel at the end of the season—sort of tired and bored and willing to relax and go in for work and rest and athletics for a change.

"I had only been the butler's companion for a few weeks when Old Man Singleton dropped in one evening—yes, sir, old Lemuel Singleton himself. He came to see the butler's mother, Mrs. Hodgkins. He had known her a good many years before, when Jake Hergesheimer's guest were some months. Not that Jake knew about it, but if he had known it, he wouldn't have cared. This Jake was a real human being.

"And his clothes fit me; just as if I had been measured for them. He had what you might call an automatic tailor, Jake did. Every six weeks, rain or shine, that tailor delivered a new suit of clothes to the Hergesheimer house, and he sent in his bill once a year, so Larry, the butler, told me. Some people go away and forget to stop the milk, and when Jake sailed for the other side of the world he forgot to tell anybody to stop the tailor. Larry didn't feel as if it were any part of his duty to stop him; for Larry liked that tailor. He made Larry's clothes, too.

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"AND I didn't see where it was up to me to protest. As I said, Jake's garments might have been made for me. In fact, a great many of them were made for me. There were at least fifteen suits of clothes that had never been worn in that house, made to my measure and Jake's, when I became butler's companion in the establishment, and they kept right on coming. Also there was a standing order for orchestra seats at the Metropolitan. Jake had a box every second Thursday, or something like that, but when he really wanted to hear the music and see the show he usually sat in the orchestra. Not only did his business suits fit me, but his dress clothes fit me, too.

"I used to go often with a lady's maid that had the same access to clothing as I did. She was part of a caretaking staff. Being a writing person, you have, of course, only viewed New York's society and near-society from the outside, and no doubt you have been intimidated by the haughty manners of the servants. Well, when you get close to swells and really know them personally, you will find they are human, too.

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"It is that, Lemuel," said the old man, though his cellar and grocers

were at our service, and he never questioned a bill, Larry said. There were twelve or fifteen hand-picked servants in our little social circle that year, and before I left there I can begin to understand how these debutes feel at the end of the season—sort of tired and bored and willing to relax and go in for work and rest and athletics for a change.

"I had only been the butler's companion for a few weeks when Old Man Singleton dropped in one evening—yes, sir, old Lemuel Singleton himself. He came to see the butler's mother, Mrs. Hodgkins. He had known her a good many years before, when Jake Hergesheimer's guest were some months. Not that Jake knew about it, but if he had known it, he wouldn't have cared. This Jake was a real human being.

"Well, Mary," says the old man, "I kind of like to have it round me all the time—uh-huh—a little bit where I can put my hands on it, all the time. I used to carry gold, but I gave that up; it's too heavy for what it's worth. But I like it, Mary; I used to look at that gold and say to myself:

"Well, there's one thing you got when you left home! And they aren't going to take it away from you, either!" It was a long time before I could make paper seem as real to me as gold. But it does now."

"He chewed over that for quite a while, as if he was something personal in it, and he gave me a ten-dollar bill for a Christmas present. He isn't as stingy as some people says

"One night, when they had been gassing for a while, they sort of got it's you, Ed, is it?"

"And, snuffing and sneezing, he passed in front of me.

"And as he passed by me that bar said something to my hand. And the hand raised up. It wasn't any of my doings, it was all the hand and the bar. It raised up, that bar did, right behind the old man's head. He stopped just outside the front door and flapped his big, bony feet on a rug that was there, to get the snow off his shoes, and while he flapped and sneezed that bar was right over the old man's brain box.

"Meaning," I asked him, "that if you were ever to let loose of any of it, it might work harm in the world?"

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"'Ha! Hum!' said he, and sneezed. 'It's you, Ed, is it?'

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"at anything but this. And this is through with. And I'm through with. I'm a bum from now on. There's no use kidding myself: I'm a bum."

"And yet, often, I'm glad I didn't do it."

"Ed brooded in silence for a while.

"And then I said, 'It's strange he didn't know you.'

"It's been ten years," said Ed, "and you saw that the old man's got to the doddering stage. He likely wouldn't know his own children if he didn't see them every day or two."

"I suppose," I said, "that the old man feels he is ending his days in a very satisfactory manner—the national prohibition thing triumphant, and all that."

"How do you mean?" asked Ed.

"Don't you know?" I said. "Why, old man Singleton, it is said, helped finance the fight and used his money and his influence on other big money all over the country in getting next to doubtful politicians and putting the thing through the state legislatures. I don't mean there was anything crooked about it anywhere, but he was one of the bunch that represented organized power and put the stunt across while the liquor interests were still saying national prohibition could never come."

"The hell he did!" said Ed. "I didn't know he was mixed up with it. I never saw him take a drink, now that I remember, except the brandy on the night I saved his life."

"Old man Singleton," I said, "is credited with having had more to do with it than any other person, by those who are on the inside."

"The old cost!" said Ed. "And then added wryly: 'I hope he gets as stiff in his knee-joint as I am and lives forever! He's made a bum of me!'

It was three or four weeks after my talk with Ed that I read in the papers a peculiar accident, of which old man Singleton had been the victim. A head of cabbage, he said, had fallen out of a tree and hit him on his own head one evening as he was walking along in Central Park. He had been dazed by the blow for a moment, and when he regained his feet a considerable sum of money which he had been carrying was gone. He was sure he had been struck by a head of cabbage, for a head of cabbage lay on the pathway near him when he was helped to his feet. He did not pretend to be able to say how a head of cabbage could have gotten into one of the park trees.

The police discredited his story, pointing out that likely the old man, who was nearsighted, had blundered against a tree in the dusk and struck his head. The head of cabbage, they told the reporters, could have had nothing to do with it; it could not have come into contact with his head at all, unless, indeed, some one had put it into a sack and swung it on him like a bludgeon; and this, the police said, was too absurd to be considered. For why should a crook use a head of cabbage when the same result might have been attained with the more usual blackjack, stick or fist?

Old man Singleton was not badly hurt, and as regards the loss of the money, he never said, nor did his family ever say, just how large the sum was. Mr. Singleton had the vague impression that after the cabbage fell out of the tree and hit him he had been helped to his feet by a man who limped and who said to him: "Kale is given to them that can best use it, to have and to